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SUBJECT: NASA SCIENTISTS ENGAGE YOUTH ON SOLAR RESEARCH IN  
TUNISIA

REF: 05 TUNIS 2333

¶1. SUMMARY. On March 23-24, 2006, four NASA scientists addressed Tunisian youth interested in science and solar research at the main Tunisian public science center. Following up on a successful visit in fall 2005, the scientists participated in workshops with the Tunisian Young Scientists Association, as well as other interested students. Two lectures, discussions and a model rocket launch improved Tunisian understanding of US scientific policies, gave students exposure to the latest research, and paved the way for other USG engagement of a key audience of youth. END SUMMARY.

¶2. While enroute to monitor a March 29 total solar eclipse in Libya, four NASA scientists participated in science workshops and lectures, which maintained momentum with the young Tunisian students recruited during an October 2005 annular eclipse program (reftel) in the southern Tunisian city of Douz. Lead NASA astrophysicist, Joseph Davila, who also participated in the October program, organized presentations primarily for the Tunisian Young Scientists Association (AJST), which has active ties with NASA and was documented in the documentary "Kussuf," jointly funded by the OES bureau and Embassy Tunis' PD section. NASA colleagues Michael Comberiate, Madhulika Guhathakurta and Orville St. Cyr accompanied Davila.

¶3. The NASA scientists' first event was held in Tunis at the new American Corner established by the Embassy's Public Affairs office at AMIDEAST. The lecture, "Stereo: Three Dimensional Observations of the Sun," drew a crowd of about 70 students. This was impressive, as Tunisian students were on spring break at the time. Interested students were provided with a brief tour and orientation of American Corner, encouraging them and their families and friends to use this space in the future. Students appeared quite pleased to learn about the American Corner and how they could use it to study and do research, including on the Internet.

¶4. The second NASA lecture was given at the Cite des Sciences public exposition center in Tunis and was open to both AJST members and the general public. This lecture drew about 90-100 students from AJST and 15-20 other young people. The topic was "Using Miniature Rockets for Science within NASA." After the presentation, students peppered Davila with questions for over 40 minutes, until the Mr. Hassan Akrouit, head of the AJST, closed the session. Students continued to swarm Davila after the lights were turned off, and followed him outside to continue their questions and requests for follow-up information.

¶5. The scientists and the students also participated in a launch of model rockets at the Tunisian military base, Borj

El Amri, where the students were able to show the scientists the progress of their work in the science club. This event was restricted to only the students and the scientists. Press coverage of the visit was positive, and appeared in two of the main Tunisian daily papers, Ash Sharouq and La Presse.

15. COMMENT: Science is clearly a topic of interest to Tunisian youth, and programming such as this fosters good bi-lateral relations while allowing us to reach a key audience. Embassy Tunis would like to thank both NASA, and State's OES Bureau for providing the program direction and funding to make this event possible. Post will look for similar opportunities to continue to engage these groups in the future. END COMMENT.  
HUDSON